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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBAI 000363

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/7/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KNNP](#) [IR](#) [IS](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: MOHAMMAD GERGAWI DISCUSSES IRAN, IRAQ AND ISRAEL WITH
SENATOR LIEBERMAN

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CLASSIFIED BY: Paul R Sutphin, Consul General, Dubai, UAE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY. Senator Joseph Lieberman (I, CN) met with Mohammad Gergawi, UAE Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, on May 29. Gergawi, also a close advisor to UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai ruler Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum (MbR), described education as a primary weapon against radicalism. MbR's recently-announced \$10 billion education foundation - which Gergawi will spearhead - will aim to educate and provide job opportunities for youth in the Arab and Muslim world (septel). On Iran, Gergawi expressed his belief that dialogue was the best for the United States. Gergawi said that Foreign Minister Mottaki assured him that Iran had no intention to develop nuclear weapons or "wipe out" Israel. Gergawi told the Senator that the UAE and Israel had a significant relationship; he hoped the Senator would help America's Jewish community understand this, as well as encourage the University of Connecticut to revisit its decision to suspend efforts to establish a campus in Dubai. On Syria, Gergawi said he believed Damascus is ready to make peace with Israel. End Summary.

Dubai - A Positive Alternative to the Radicals

12. (C) Gergawi, who is also the head of Dubai Holdings, perhaps the largest of Dubai's parastatals with assets in the hundreds of billions, reminded the Senator that the UAE is a partner with the US in the war on terror. However, he said, the UAE prefers to exercise "soft power" to achieve progress. The government of Dubai is building a modern, tolerant, and progressive state that aims to be a model for the region. Dubai's "liberal" model provides a positive alternative to radicalism for the youth in the region.

13. (C) Gergawi identified "weak governments incapable of running countries efficiently" as a key regional problem. Dubai has been training government officials from throughout the Arab world at the Dubai School of Government (DSG) to address this concern. Raising the competence of governments, Dubai seeks to spread moderation and modernization, and thus fight the radicalism the "soft way."

MbR's New Foundation

14. (C) Gergawi noted he would be heading MbR's \$10 billion

educational foundation, which aims at "raising the level of thinking of youth" in the Arab and Muslim world, as well as providing job skills and opportunities. Gergawi commented that "over the past few years radicals have gained ground in the region," and MbR's new fund is one of Dubai's weapons to counter the radicals. One early initiative will be sending "unfortunate students with potential" to western universities for training. These students will return to the region and "make a difference". In addition, the endowment will fund "business incubators" as the region needs "18 million jobs".

15. (SBU) In addition to youth training, Gergawi said the Foundation would aim to elevate culture. The endowment will seek to double the number of books translated into Arabic every year, as this "will open minds". Additionally, Gergawi said he wants to double the number of authors writing books in Arabic.

16. (C) Gergawi stated that American education is one of greatest powers the US wields. Many of the leaders in Dubai and throughout the Gulf studied in the US, and it was "US education that taught us to be tolerant". American education, he posited, will change Iran. Already, many Iranians send their children to Dubai to study in American-system schools.

Iran

17. (C) Gergawi believes US dialogue with Iran is the best path toward reconciliation. He said the recent US-Iran direct meeting in Baghdad was a positive step. He urged the US to engage "voices" in Iran beyond the GOI, including the many groups who are not happy with the current regime. This included the supporters of former Iranian president Khatami, the "traders in the bazaar", and the majority of the youth. He pointed out that many young Iranians are trying to be "American."

18. (C) Gergawi added that Iran is not a monolith and that there are many ideological elements. He mentioned a split among the

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Iranian clerics about whether the center of Shi'a Islam lay in Qom, Iran or in Najaf, Iraq. He said that there are similar political rifts in the regime. Gergawi commented that while Ahmedinejad vociferously threatens Israel, Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki personally assured him at the World Economic Forum in Jordan that Iran has no intention to "wipe out" Israel.

19. (C) Gergawi said that the Iranian leadership sees a leadership vacuum in the region and wants Iran to fill it. He added that the one question is whether or not the Iranian regime wants a war with America. He commented that a war would, in fact, help Ahmedinejad by uniting all Iranians behind him -- thus he might consider war a viable option.

Iranian Nuclear Ambitions

110. (C) Gergawi expressed doubts about Iran's nuclear ambitions. He said "much of what they [Iran] say is just talk", and doesn't believe Iran possesses all of the technology it claims. The best means to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons is to go to the source countries, China and North Korea, and convince them to stop supplying Iran. He said that Ahmedinejad had "sworn" during his recent visit to the UAE that Iran was pursuing only nuclear power, and not a nuclear weapon.

Israel

111. (S) Gergawi told the Senator that an "unofficial" relationship between the UAE and Israel existed. He asked for Senator Lieberman's support in helping the American Jewish community understand that this relationship exists. However, the UAE is in a "tough neighborhood" and must be "smart" handling the relationship. The UAE "cannot change the region in a day or two," and needs to be careful about getting out in front of its

regional allies. Gergawi added that delegations from the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee had recently made positive visits in the UAE.

¶12. (C) Gergawi also asked the Senator's assistance in revitalizing the stalled University of Connecticut project to build a 4,000-student campus in Dubai's Academic City (a Dubai Holdings project). The Senator said he would look into the situation.

Iraq

¶13. (C) When the Senator asked for Gergawi's advice on Iraq, Gergawi was adamant that a US failure in Iraq would throw the whole region into chaos. He commented that the Saudis are now trying to use their influence to improve the situation in Iraq and that many Iraqi tribes are now turning against al-Qaeda. Gergawi believes that Iraq needs a stronger government much different than the current one, which "has its roots in Iran." Gergawi suggested former PM Ayad Allawi as a good long-term option to unite Iraqis.

Syria

¶14. (C) Gergawi suggested to the Senator that the US should start a dialogue with Syria. Syria is linked to Iran, HAMAS and Hizballah and a dialogue could be the way to weaken these links. Gergawi added he believes Syria is ready for peace with Israel.

¶15. (C) Bashar al Assad visited Dubai a few months ago and he asked Dubai's leadership how he could change the situation in Syria for the better. Gergawi concurred with Senator Lieberman's assessment that Bashar's leadership has been weak, and beset by entrenched centers of power. Gergawi was firm that if there were forced "regime change" in Syria, it would "become another Iraq."

¶16. (U) Senator Lieberman departed Dubai prior to the drafting of this cable.

SUTPHIN